



CCA Cinema News

Paul Barnes's Weekly Update on What's Happening

By Paul Barnes, CCA Cinemas
General Manager



Photo: Linda Carfagno



Jonathan Glazer's film begins
January 26

This week (**January 26-February 1**) CCA is screening TWO Oscar nominees for Best Picture!

On **Friday, January 26**, CCA will be opening director Jonathan Glazer's ***The Zone of Interest*** in which a German couple and their family find their dream home next to the wall of Auschwitz. The film resolutely never leaves its depiction of their daily domestic life in their home and garden -- but what we *HEAR* from behind that wall is something else entirely. ***The Zone of Interest*** is one of the year's most controversial and powerful films.

And because ***American Fiction*** has done so well at CCA, I'm holding it over for a *third week* in the Studio. Stagg R. Leigh's confounding success with his fake novel *My Pafology* led one CCA audience member to call the film one of the funniest and most thought provoking she'd seen in quite a while.

Just this morning the Academy Award nominations were announced, and both films wound up with multiple nods – *five* for ***The Zone of Interest*** including Best Director and Best International Feature, and *five* for ***American Fiction*** including Best Actor for Jeffrey Wright and Best Supporting Actor for Sterling K. Brown!

Acclaimed WWII drama

In *The Film Verdict*, Alonso Duralde wrote about ***The Zone of Interest***:



Hedwig Höss (Sandra Hüller) in her garden

In the same way that some films forever change the context in which you hear a certain song, Jonathan Glazer's gutting WWII drama will, from now on, always come to mind whenever I hear a reference to Hannah Arendt and "the banality of evil."

In *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw started his review of **The Zone of Interest** with a question:

How did the placidly respectable home life of the German people coexist with imagining and executing the horrors of the genocide? How did such evil flower within what George Steiner famously called the German world of 'silent night, holy night, *gemütlichkeit*'?

Bradshaw continues:

The Zone of Interest imagines the pure bucolic bliss experienced by Auschwitz camp commandant Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel) who with his family lives in a handsomely appointed family home with servants just outside the barbed-wire-topped wall. His wife, Hedwig (Sandra Hüller) is thrilled with the Edenic "paradise garden" she has been allowed to supervise at the rear, complete with greenhouse: she revels smugly in her unofficial title "Queen of Auschwitz" – and with just that line alone, **The Zone of Interest** has probably delivered enough nausea for a thousand films.



The Zone of Interest director Jonathan Glazer Photo: Victor Boyko/Getty Images

Jonathan Glazer is not a prolific film director. He has made only four films in a 23-year period. His first was the remarkable, critically acclaimed gangster movie *Sexy Beast* (2000) that featured Ben Kingsley in perhaps his best performance. He followed that with *Birth* in 2004 starring Nicole Kidman, a film whose reputation has only grown over the years. Nine years later in 2013 came a real breakthrough with the sci-fi adaptation *Under the Skin* starring Scarlett Johansson. That film showed real growth in Glazer's visionary filmmaking and many critics and publications considered it the year's best. But ten years have past since the memorable *Under the Skin*.

Jonathan Glazer had been “circling around” the idea of doing a Holocaust film for a while, but was stymied by what new could be said about this horror except that it was pure evil. “Because the subject is so vast and because of the sensitivities involved, I felt I had to educate myself in a deeper way,” Glazer said in an interview. “So I spent a couple of years just reading books on the subject, watching documentaries, reading eye-witness accounts, trying to understand the impulses that drew me to the subject to begin with, before I even put pen to paper.”



Director Glazer with producer James Wilson. Photo: Vivien Killilea/Getty Images

Glazer came across an excerpt from a novel-in-progress by Martin Amis called *The Zone of Interest*, which was a fictionalized story set in a concentration camp. The story came from the perspective of the camp commandant. In 2014, Glazer optioned the film rights to the novel.

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“What hooked Jonathan was that point of view, that perpetrator point of view”, Glazer’s producer James Wilson said in an interview, “The idea of making a Holocaust film from the German Nazi perspective.”

In adapting the novel, Glazer realized the fictionalized central character was based on the real-life Rudolf Höss, the longest serving commandant of Auschwitz. He lived next to the camp in a villa with his family. Their home was just a few hundred yards from the gas chambers and the crematoria, separated only by the camp wall.



Life on the Höss family side of the wall in *The Zone of Interest*

“I imagined myself at one point as a prisoner,” recalled Glazer, “hearing the sounds of the Höss children splashing and laughing in their swimming pool on the other side of the wall. The idea of the film became about that WALL, about how that wall is a direct manifestation of how we ourselves as human beings compartmentalize the things we were happy to indulge in...and the things – sometimes horrible things – we want to disassociate ourselves from. That became the axiom of the whole endeavor.”

Glazer decided to make the real-life Höss family the central figures in his film and deeply researched their lives. He shifted to telling their story in a way that showed them not as monsters, but as human beings being monstrous. Glazer said, “So much cinema



A bucolic life?

about the Holocaust shows the perpetrators as almost mythologically evil. I realized I wanted to make a film about these people and their ordinariness.”

In *The Boston Globe*, Natalia Winkleman wrote, “The film is not just about a Nazi couple, or even just about the banality of evil. Rather, it is about the ways in which people close themselves off to destabilizing truths.”

Key to Jonathan Glazer’s vision for ***The Zone of Interest*** is that he never takes us behind that wall. We stay constantly with the Höss family in their home and garden. We only HEAR what is going on behind that WALL.

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Sound editor Johnnie Burn recalled:

Me and my team spent a year out recording the sounds of different industrial processes from a distance – bottling factories, industrial incinerators... the kinds of birds, the bees that would have been there at the time, the different military period vehicles and period guns, testing how they would sound when fired from the correct distance, taking into account the echoes, the recoil. It was all very methodical.



Glazer on location near Höss family home with Polish cinematographer Łukasz Żal. Photo: Kuba Kaminski

During the edit, Johnnie Burn with film editor Paul Watts and Glazer would move back and forth through scenes, adjusting how the mood of the story would change when they added the snap of a distant gunshot or the rumble of a train bringing in another load of prisoners to the camp.

“We went through the film and cut it so that the story of the whole family drama would work,” recalls Johnnie Burn, “then we went back through and edited it to sound like a horror film.” One of the Oscar nominations announced this morning for ***The Zone of Interest*** was for Best Sound.

Producer James Wilson says, “We’re not Nazis, but we have some of the same behaviors that we see in the Höss family – of

compartmentalizing, of looking away, ignoring what is beyond the wall. That, I suppose, is what the film is trying to say.”



In the Höss home in *The Zone of Interest*

Jonathan Glazer has said that his approach with ***The Zone of Interest*** is to tell the story of the Holocaust not “as something safely in the past, but quite the opposite – that this is a story of the here and now.”

Critic Barry Hall wrote in the British newspaper *Globe and Mail* that ***The Zone of Interest*** is “a deeply chilling and precisely engineered nightmare that is the best and most important film of 2023, our shared year of blind eyes and buried heads.”

The Zone of Interest recently swept the prestigious Los Angeles Critics Association Awards earning four in total – Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress Sandra Hüller (tied with Emma Stone), and Best Music Score by Mica Levi. And the National Society of Film Critics awarded ***The Zone of Interest*** its Best Director and Best Actress prizes.

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A quick note about CCA's Studio cinema

Since the new projector went in in December, it feels like a different theater! The screen was thoroughly cleaned while we were waiting for the projector to arrive.

We also corrected some flaws in the sound system and fixed a partially broken speaker. The new projector is a state-of-the-art laser projector (as opposed to the old lamp projector that died) and the laser is able to give us a *far* better visual image.

Initially, the new projector was a bit noisy and some of you complained. But last week, our facilities manager James Gould created a sound proof lid that successfully muffles the new projector's noise, but still allows for enough air ventilation so that it doesn't overheat. I have to give many thanks to CCA's Justin Rhody and Jayson Jacobson for their great work in the overall installation and improvements.



Music of *Maestro* in its full glory in the Studio through Jan 25

I went in the other day and watched part of ***Before the Sun***. It looked and sounded glorious! I even thought that the screen itself felt bigger!

I know many of you prefer to see films in CCA's larger Cinema, but because of all the improvements, I'm encouraging you to give our new, improved Studio another try. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.



Past Lives at CCA through Jan 25

And my usual reminder!

If you still haven't seen ***Past Lives*** or ***Maestro***, you only have two more days to do so – **Wednesday, January 24 and Thursday, January 25**. This morning, *both* were nominated by the Academy for Best Picture Oscars!! Both movies are playing in the Studio this week, so it would be your chance to experience the re-vamped Studio theater. Screening times both days are:

- ***Maestro*** at 11:00am and 4:30pm.
- ***Past Lives*** at 2:00pm and 7:30pm.

American Fiction is a hit!

And speaking of the Studio, ***American Fiction*** will be moving into that theater this week as ***The Zone of Interest*** moves into the Cinema. It's the third week for Cord Jefferson's debut feature and the CCA audience is still loving it!



Clifford (Sterling K. Brown) lets loose in *American Fiction*

Sterling K. Brown gives a wonderful performance as the novelist Thelonious "Monk" Ellison's brother Clifford. A flashy plastic surgeon recently divorced, Clifford has just come out of the closet and is struggling to find a footing in his family after hiding his queer identity for years. This role in ***American Fiction*** gave Brown the chance to shed the image of one of his most career-defining characters – Randall Pearson in the hit TV series *This is Us*.

As Brown noted in an interview, "Clifford is a lovely sort of comedic foil. He's also a person who needs to be dealt with rather than the person who's dealing with everything. It's kind of nice to be the dude who has to be dealt with." Brown just earned an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his performance.



Brown on the set of *American Fiction* with Issa Rae, Wright, and director Cord Jefferson

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In the same interview, Brown spoke about *American Fiction* fulfilling an appetite for Black stories onscreen:

For a long time, the idea in Hollywood that Black stories of triumph from poverty or imprisonment or enslavement were the only stories that would resound with a mainstream audience, and that other slices of life would be mundane -- when whites get to tell those stories all the time. The idea that a mainstream audience would not be able to see themselves in a protagonist that did not look like them is also being challenged because marginalized people have been asked to do that exact thing forever. There's no reason that the opposite shouldn't hold true as well.

Is there an appetite, especially outside New York and Los Angeles, to see something that has real wit, real intelligence, real humor with Black folks front and center? I still don't know the answer. In the past we've attempted to do things, and they've been met with a lukewarm reception. I'm hopeful that large audiences, not just Black or white, but everybody can see themselves in Monk's shoes and say, "this is the kind of story that we would like to see more of." You vote with your dollar.



Does girlfriend Coraline (Erika Alexander) know that "Stagg" is really Monk (Jeffrey Wright)?

Cord Jefferson's eloquent and very funny script just earned an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay! Well, so far *American Fiction* seems headed for mainstream success, not just with critics, but as our CCA audiences are proving with box office success as well.

Top Oscar films at CCA!

So, come to CCA and experience two very unique films – already award-winners *and* strong Oscar contenders – certainly two of the *most outstanding* films in a very rich year for film.



All the best,

Paul Barnes,
General Manager, CCA Cinemas